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Pumping Iron in Residential Aged Adults: Why isn't this more commonly available?

Running Title: Resistance training and residential aged adults.

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Dear Editor,

The demand for residential aged care (RAC) placement will more than treble by 2050 (1). With population ageing, an Australian adult who is currently 65 years of age has a greater than 20 projected years of life expectancy. When coupled with the increased prevalence and number of complex health care conditions, it is reported the impending need for care nationally will dramatically increase (1). Consequently, the Australian health care system may need to adopt more innovative, evidence-based approaches to offset the high level of sedentary behaviour, disability and poor health in many of our older people, especially those residing in RAC (2).

For the healthy community dwelling older adults, research has long established that exercise, even when commenced later in life, has measurable benefits to wellbeing (3, 4). More recently, exercise is receiving significant attention as a means of prolonging and revitalising health in community dwelling older adults with care needs. However, it is resistance and weight bearing training that has been demonstrated to be the most potent stimulus to increase muscle mass, muscle strength and muscle function among older adults with care needs, with significant reductions in mobility disability and number of falls. In a recent systematic review on resistance and weight bearing exercise training in RAC, it was shown that participation significantly improves balance, flexibility, ability to rise from a chair, stair climbing power, gait performance, positive self-perception and self-sufficiency (5). In addition, participants had a greater satisfaction with life despite their age, level of chronic diseases, sedentary lifestyle and function disabilities (5). However, resistance and weight bearing exercise continues to be underutilized and understudied as a disability preventative in RAC.

We therefore strongly encourage health professionals working with older adults to more actively promote and/or deliver progressive resistance and balance training to as many older adults as possible. We also strongly encourage many more researchers to examine issues affecting the feasibility of progressive resistance and weight bearing exercise in RAC settings. Such interactions between health professionals and researchers have the potential to result in significant benefits to RAC residents, staff and the national healthcare expenditure.

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